

The Foothills View

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"We See It Your Way"

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An Interview

"Banjo Man" Earl Scruggs

He left the Flint Hills farm in 1945, and picking 'banjo all the way' became one of this country's foremost bluegrass musicians. But last Sunday, as grand marshal of Shelby's Christmas parade, he was a Cleveland County native come home: Earl Scruggs.

Between his leaving home and his heading the parade last Sunday, a whole generation has grown up listening to Earl Scruggs' distinctive style of five-string banjo. He first popularized it 33 years ago in his 1948 record, "Foggy Mountain Breakdown." Later, in the 50's, Scruggs was the matching half, in white shirt and string tie, of the famous Lester Flatt-Earl Scruggs bluegrass team on the Martha White Self Rising Flour television program.

The two separated in 1969. Afterwards Scruggs went on the road with the Earl Scruggs Review, comprising his sons Randy, Gary, and Steve.

Also in 1969, Scruggs surprised the country music establishment by playing Nov. 15 at the Mobilization Day To End the Vietnam War, which drew 250,000 demonstrators to Washington. The protest, largest in the history of the nation's capital, won the endorsement of 23 senators, including two Republicans, but the more conservative country musicians criticized Scruggs for his appearance there.

In 1976 Scruggs was the subject of "Banjo Man," a film documentary, and in 1973 was honored at "Earl Scruggs Day" at Gardner-Webb College. Before the parade Sunday he was in Boiling Springs staying at the home of his brother, Horace. He met there with the View.

Ham baking in the kitchen filled the house like a memory of home. The two brothers, Earl and Horace, sat in the front room, and easily joked with each other. From a back room came the voices of their wives, Louise and Maida. The women talked of birth, death, the growth of children: serious family business. The men's talk was freer, less responsible, punctuated by jokes. Here's the interview with Earl and Horace Scruggs:

View: Earl, who was your first teacher in music?

Earl Scruggs: (Laughs) We didn't have any teacher. We did it all by ear. Back then you heard a song, you got that tune in your mind, and then you'd go play it.

View: You've mentioned that your father loved music.

Earl Scruggs: Yes. Of course it's hard for me to remember Daddy playing very much. He got sick with cancer and died when I was real young (The elder Scruggs died in 1928 when Earl Scruggs was four).

Horace Scruggs: I remember him waking us up many a morning playing on his banjo. View: Did you start to play any instrument other than banjo?

Earl Scruggs: It's been banjo all the way. Oh, I tried to play the fiddle. I remember trying to play it. I made a lot of noise with it.

View: Did you perform in Washington in 1969 as a result of talking with your sons? Earl Scruggs: (leaning forward, marking emphasis with his hands) No, I decided it on my own. I felt real strong about that. I saw what was going to go down in history as one of our most stupid wars was getting our boys killed.

"I tried the fiddle. I made a lot of noise with it."

*— Earl Scruggs,
the banjo man*

View: You got a lot of respect from the younger generation for that performance.

Earl Scruggs: Well, I didn't do it for that. I had traveled around and met a lot of politicians, and I just didn't think there was anything funny about that war.

View: Would you do it again?

Earl Scruggs: Sure I would. Now I'm not a professional profeesor or anything like that. But I believe that just like a person has a vote, he should have an opinion.

View: To go back to the early days, who did you play music with after you left the farm?

Earl Scruggs: A man by the name of "Lost John" Miller. Then I was with Bill Monroe...then after I wanted to get off the road, for a while, I signed with Columbia Records in 1950.

View: How much were you paid?

Earl Scruggs: Fifty dollars a week.

View: That's a lot of money for a musician in 1950.

Earl Scruggs: Yes, I did real well (He and Horace laugh).

Horace Scruggs: Particularly when you'd been making 40 cents an hour at the Lily Mills. View: Earl, is bluegrass music the same music as when you started?

Earl Scruggs: Oh, it's changed, of course, but that's life. change. The biggest change I suppose is that you can't play the small towns any more. This inflation has just about made it impossible to support a show like that. Where did you say you're from, northern Alabama? Well, all through the 50's and 60's we used to play places like that, playing in local schools and small buildings. I hate to see those days go. You'd play your music and go face-to-face with rural people.

View: Horace and Earl Scruggs, thank you.



Fire At Dormitory

Gardner-Webb officials estimate damage at between six and eight thousand dollars following Friday's fire at 2 p.m. in a third floor room at women's Stroup Dormitory. No one was injured. Six county fire departments responded to the fire, which Boiling Springs Fire Chief Don McSwain said apparently started from a short in a television. In other action, city police report a quiet week with no arrests, while Boiling Springs rescue carried 12 people to local hospitals after a two vehicle wreck at Sandy Run Church Road on Friday. Two of the 12 were admitted.

Shriners Host Six Children

By Ann Henson View Staff Writer

"A man never stands so tall as when he stoops to help a crippled child" is the motto on the side of the Burke County Shrine float in the Christmas parade Sunday at Shelby. Six local children rode that float as a living example.

Piedmont Shrine Club members hosted a Christmas party before the parade at the Governor's Inn motel honoring children from Cleveland County who have or will be a patient in one of their hospitals.

Thirty-six children were invited to the celebration and among the 25 present were: Tonya Peay from Lattimore, Willie Irvin from Beaver Dam, Dennis Hamrick from New House, and Kevin Ball from Boiling Springs. Another Boiling Springs resident, Greg Griffin, was unable to attend.

According to Hospital Committee Chairman Joe Stockton 75 children from Cleveland County have been treated since the committee was formed in 1974. All treatment, transportation, and therapy is provided for the children at no cost to the parents.

Children who have been treated at the Shrine hospitals have only good things to say about their stay. Perhaps it's because as Shirley Peay, Tonya's mother, said about the nurses in the Greenville Unit, "They do not have anything happen to interfere with the happiness of their children."

Education is not interrupted when a child enters the hospital. His books are brought with him and teachers are provided to check his progress. They have boy scouts, a beauty shop, and every Sunday Shriners come to visit or entertain.

"Would you be my mommie, too?" was a question often put to Mrs. Peay when she visited Tonya and she gladly filled in for parents who live too far away to visit often. "I looked forward to it," she said.

Kevin Ball, 11-year-old honor roll student at West Cleveland School, has not yet been to the Shrine hospital, but he's looking forward to his visit to Greenville. He has even requested to be allowed to watch his own operation.

Cincinnati's Burn Institute works on the same principal as the Greenville Unit except the rules are stricter because the chances for infection are greater. Barbara Griffin, Greg's mother, called the hospital "Spotlessly clean."

She urges everyone to go to one of the Shrine hospitals if they ever have a chance "just to see what these people do for other people."

After all as Shriner Joe Stockton says, "helping children is what the Shrine Club is all about."

Area News

The annual Boiling Springs Christmas Parade, sponsored by the Boiling Springs Recreation Committee, will get underway Thursday, Dec. 10, at 4 p.m.

The parade will begin at C.J. Hamrick's, continue down Main Street, and disperse at Boiling Springs Baptist Church. Rev. S.L. Lamin, a well known figure in the Boiling Springs area, will be the 1981 Grand Marshal.

The 60 entries include Crest and Gardner-Webb bands, the Piedmont Pistons and various floats sponsored by local businesses.

Local schools will be dismissed early for the event.

Rezoning for industry continues to draw responses in our "Letters to the Editor" column. Mrs. Lula Patrick's letter in defense of town council's zoning changes is on this week's Commentary page on The VIEW